

A Bihu of hope amidst dejection, Garbhanga Forest



Comments 1



Peter Alex Todd 27 April 2012 18062 views

Far from the hustle and bustle of Guwhati life and amidst ongoing big Bihu functions, a small Bihu function in Jalukpaham village, inside Garbhanga Reserve forest had swung the local tribal population into action in the day break on 24th April. A function perhaps the locals had never imagined in their wildest dreams and for sure perhaps someday this will be one of the sweetest memories in the history for these local people of Jalukpaham and Matang village. And for many aged people this Bihu celebration is the finest live entertainment they have ever seen in their life time. Most of the people have not even seen Guwahati, don't know about the chief minister, but luckily some have heard about Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, however not sure what he does, dead or alive. These villages' just 30 kms away from the capital of Assam.



A very newly formed club with locals of Jalukpaham and Matang Village, in the west Guwahati constituency, under the advice of Nayan Das, Bhadrashwar Orang, Primary Teacher of Jalukpaham LP School and few others propelled the formation of “Jaluk-Matang Navajagaran Younglong Sangha” and at one breath decided to organized the first Rongali Bihu Function for two days. In no time the idea got a practical shape and with little collection from the local people, helped by well-wishers in different ways the Bihu function was held. “I have worked in this Jalukpaham LP School for long time, just three years to go for retirement, I never thought someday a Bihu function would be organized here, few guys from the plains came here and we could motivate the people here” said Bhadrashwar Orang. His students later performed Jyoti Sangeet and dance to the tune of Jhumur, it was only the teacher who belonged to the Tea tribe. Yet it was passion for music and love that the performance stroked the right feeling, the feeling of love, respect and understanding one another.

Once the Bihu Committee got tired waiting for the Local MLA, Himanta Talukdar who was invited to the function, the president of the club inaugurated the function. These simple people had beautifully organized the dais on the bamboo stage with glass of waters, flowers, table covered with colourful faded bed sheets, and ziz-zag curtains hired from tent-house since to welcome since promise was made by the MLA to visit their place. The local people could hardly realise that villagers are valued only once in five years and since there is no schedule for any election, who cares. “The MLA told that he would come and give us some helping hand, but he didn’t come, we collected money from the villagers to organize this Bihu, prepared food for the MLA,” said Biren Taro, Cultural secretary.



Whatever may be the show must go on and in fact the show went to be a high voltage show which was not at all expected. In the late afternoon traditional games for children began, and for many, from jump, cock fight, tug-of-war and pani-par was totally new. Very strange the kids were playing for the first time. The only things they know here is to catch fish, follow their mother in the jhoom cultivation, climb trees or lazily lay in the stream when its hot. However the games were managed well and the organizers failed to provoke the very shy women folk to take part in games, from a safe distance they tried to study the game and laughed well when the kids were doing the cock-fighting.

After a long wait and uncertainty a jeep reaches the venue, a pair of loud speakers looked very majestic in the jeep was unloaded; a pair of small sound box, a pair of light and finally the generator “the soul” of the function, was carefully unloaded placed in the backyard.” Where is the diesel gallon?” one shouted and I got nervous for a moment only to find everything was well taken care of. I had already brought my musical instruments n the trekker ferrying my journalist friends and my singer friends.



It was a well wisher that had helped the sound system reached the spots and after all efforts had failed to convince many sound operators to send their minimum sound requirement to this place. “I am relaxed at last, thanks the sound have arrived”, says Nayan Das, one of the Advisor on the Bihu Committee, who had taken the responsibility of the sound. A vehicle reaching to Jalukpaham which is around 30 kms from Lokhra is no joke, specially during rainy season. It takes an effort and experience of a SUV driver to maneuver ones way through the Garbahanga Reserve forest. Thanks for the attitude shown by the government and forest department towards the tribal people living in the forest.

By evening time Bihu teams from Lokhra, Pathar Khama (Meghalay) and some other bordering places of Meghalaya, reached the venue for Performances. A group of journalist, Singers from Guwahati had reached the venue and explored the possibility to spend the night in the tree Houses that had been built for the guests. It was full of click opportunities and I believe no one had missed a single good shot. And finally Bihu performers rocked the stage amidst good gathering; the raw sound of music in the loud speakers echoed in the hills mixed with shrill noise of the crickets gave great effects and was shooting inside the forest. I hope the wild elephants must have liked the music and there was no report of Elephants creating trouble nearby and the axe of timber smugglers had fallen silent temporarily for that very day. After all a historic event was taking place and no wanted to miss it The forest guards on their way to camp halted at the venue to steal a look of the stage through the gatherings. Perhaps they were aware that being on duty they should not stay for long and casually ventured into the dark. But deep in their heart they know well what destruction is going on inside the forest. But who cares unless blood is extracted from the body or pain inflicted. However it is long story and ever one knows.

Now keeping away my negative feelings, what gave a great sense of joy was a group of youths from Meghalaya doing the Bihu Dance, though not fit for any big stage their spirit was mind blowing and specially when you see a Khasi guy beating the Dhol, who says “its nice to do Bihu dance” wearing a Jeans and a Khadi Kurta. Another Bihu team from bordering Meghalaya village gives another surprise, a young guy claded in traditional Bihu attire speaks out in English and then switches to Nagamese “ Ami laga to besi Bihu Najane, hole bhi na Bihu nachibo ahise, Apuni laga beya napabo” and than starts the Bihu. The people applauded their effort and the Bihu committee encouraged them to keep up their spirit and expected them to see in the near future. This was followed by Rabha Dance by women folk, Nepali Dance, Karbi Dance, few modern Assamese songs, Jhumur Dance, little comedy and all these ingredients made this Bihu more close to heart to me. For many old folks of the village seeing a Bihu dance was a first had experience. Who would not love to see peace among communities, see the progress of the deprived people, wants bonhomie in the border villagers, and not the least would want the forest officials to protect the forest. The Bihu inside the forest would be meaningless if the forest someday cease to exist. no powerful sound, no big artists, no high profile people, no big stage and no gorgeous anchor, and no chairs to seat, but still this is my best Bihu I have ever enjoyed in my life. Did I exaggerate?

Most of the people here have not even seen Guwahati, don't know about the chief minister, but luckily some have heard about Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, however not sure what he does, dead or alive. These villages' just 30 kms away from the capital of Assam. Though development is at its infant stage in these villages, the impact of globalization can be seen. Mobile phones though don't have networks, it has become a possession for youths to play with it, click photos, to listen songs and record videos. However they are yet to learn the importance of being in this 21st century. But hoping this Bihu celebration will encourage them to do more activities that will help the people and kids to develop in every field. Amidst all joy I only wish that someday these people don't have to exclaim with pain "how green were our hills"

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